Physicality of the Analogue

by
Duncan Robinson
BFA(Hons)

Submitted in the fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts.

Signed statement of originality

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text.

Duncan Robinson

Signed statement of authority of access to copying

This Thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

Duncan Robinson

Abstract:

Inside the video player, spools spin, sensors read and heads rotate, generating an analogue signal from the videotape running through the system to the monitor. Within this electro mechanical space there is opportunity for intervention. Its accessibility allows direct manipulation to take place, creating imagery on the tape as pre-recorded signal of black burst[1] without sound rolls through its mechanisms.

The actual physical contact, manipulation of the tape, the moving mechanisms and the resulting images are the essence of the variable electrical space within which the analogue video signal is generated. In a way similar to the methods of the *Musique Concrete* pioneers, or EISENSTEIN's refinement of montage, I have explored the physical possibilities of machine intervention. I am working with what could be considered the last traces of analogue – audiotape was superseded by the compact disc and the videotape shall eventually be replaced by digital video[2]. For me, analogue is the space inside the video player. My work involves physical manipulation of the tape and moving parts within this space.

This exegesis examines examples and texts of artists using tape-based and digital media and discusses the processes behind what I consider to be an extreme video vision. My interventions push the boundaries of analogue vision and sound.

---

[1] Black burst is a composite video signal with a totally black picture. It is used to synchronize together video equipment so the video outputs are aligned. Black burst "tells" the video equipment the vertical sync, horizontal sync, and the chroma burst timing.
http://www.video-demystified.com/

[2] Digital video is a system whereby a continuously variable (analogue) signal is broken down and encoded into discrete binary bits that represent a mathematical model of the original signal.
http://www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/support/glossary/shtml

Acknowledgments

Leigh Hobba
Ted Colless
Dianna Graf
Mark Cornelius
Michael Knott

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction:

The way video is made fascinated me from the moment I began working with it. Instead of thinking about what was in front of the camera or on the tape, I was primarily concerned with the potential of montage and editing. The editing desk became my tool for creation; my mode of expression. The composition is constructed by the edit - the frame count and the duration. I do this intuitively, allowing an element of chance. I approach many facets of my life with meticulousness - constantly checking, rechecking and doing things twice. When confronted by video technology and its implicit order and structure, I saw a way to approach my work from a fresh angle. From the outset my interest in video has always been with its physical aspects. The flashes of colour in their still frames combined with the randomness of the edit could be read as pages of music. The visual 'sound' provides the viewer with an additional soundtrack to accompany the work, as the edit itself carries an indeterminate rhythm that will produce a beat. This visual work is my first 'sound' study; even though not producing any audio it is the sounds of the analogue videotape in visual form.

The Nature of This Research Project:

What do we see when we close our eyes? Nothing? If we close our eyes in the middle of the day in the blazing sun we can see an orange haze. When we're in a dark room, or at night, and we close our eyes tightly, what do we see? Nothing? Well in a sense we do, but is that because there is nothing noticeable or recognisable for us to assess? We see some form of black. Does this blackness classify as nothing or something? For me the blackness is the richest and most beautiful thing to enjoy. It is untainted by any outside source. But how long can that black last inside the closed eyes, how long until the brain and/or imagination places something to be seen. When deprived of vision we search for a replacement or we are offered one by our subconscious. When deprived of sound, the outside world provides the ambient sound to accompany our own continual ambient inside noise. Black is a colour and recognisable in many forms, so does this qualify as nothing when behind closed eyes?

Like silence, this black is where we must begin our vision. To understand what we see we must first see nothing. From appreciating the black and what is inside it, we then can see what we saw before in a different light. Concentrating past this and focusing on the black presents the equivalent to attempting to attain silence. Another way of achieving such results, or adding to them as the case may be, is limited to some participants. People who wear vision-correcting devices, such as glasses or contact lenses, can experience a heightened appreciation for their surroundings. When not relying on such devices they are required to concentrate much harder on their environment and pay more attention to their other senses, particularly

hearing and touch. I know my dependency on my contacts and glasses has given me a real appreciation for my eyes[1].

The attempt to see absolutely nothing is impossible, just as it is to attain complete silence. Once we close our eyes and block out all vision, we see black. But the importance of this experience for me is the continuation from that point. The tighter you close your eyes, the more light you try to hold out, the stress put upon the face gives the chance for other elements to enter. When we do, small flashes of colour appear in various forms.

The flashes of colours that I get from the direct manipulation of the heads of the video player are an attempt to recreate this phenomenon. The chance capture of this imagery is mirrored by the chance creation of colours behind tightly closed eyes. The black is the visual equivalent of a silence. It is addressing the nature of sight and non-sight, what is seen when there is nothing to see.

Behind closed eyes the viewer is susceptible to outside influence, mainly through the sense of hearing. Ambient noise shapes the silence with recognisable elements and helps the participant familiarise themselves with their environment. Sounds that locate the individual will also strike visual cues and provide imagery. In the practice of attempting to find silence the hunt for non-sight becomes heightened. Silence is the key as the black is the visual silence. Looking for a silence in the auditory sense can only help and improve the hunt and appreciation of the non-sight. Once inside this space the challenge is then to maintain both elements. Attempting either is enough to bring the participant to other ways of perception and a chance to appreciate the pure elements.

[1] This appreciation and dependency led me to photography and video where I could replace my natural eye for a mechanical one and change what can be seen, by editing and manipulation.

For me noise is all sound, musical or non-musical, ambient or directed. Noise is constant, ever changing and ever present. Noise is a product and a producer.

Silence is a creation and a creator of noise. Silence is just another word for noise. We call silence so because it needs a name. Silence is a part of noise and sound, as sounds are a part of noise.

All these are only words. If we listen we hear.

First, concentrate on the immediate sounds in your vicinity. Then stretch out your perception and listen to sounds further away or block out some elements and listen to only one or two sounds, or take away all sound and listen to the silence from within. It is quite easy to ignore the noise that surrounds us, as visual elements are much easier to approach. Ambient sound is full of layers, of chance mixings that can go by unnoticed. This accidental quality is the essence of ambience[1] and can provide the listener with the most original and enjoyable sounds. To closely listen to the immediate environment and beyond, allows the listener to participate in an experience unique to that moment.

In this sort of exercise the listener can open their perception of sound and allow a different objectivity to enter. The listener's ears can be opened to how sounds actually work and how they shape the environment with their each and own distinctive touch. The environment that surrounds us becomes part of us. To allow the sounds to actually enter and process separates the listeners from the pedestrians.

Sounds provide us with so much information we take for granted. To experiment with listening provides exercise for the ear. Listening to music or someone's voice

[1] Ambiance or ambience: the background noise or environmental sound. http://www.azstarnet.com/~solo/glossary.htm

requires concentration but listening to silence is the key to appreciating all sounds.

Absolute silence is unattainable. For example, when alone, late in the middle of the night in your darkened bedroom what do you hear? Listening to one's own personal resonance, the closest that we can get to silence, and the chance and accidental happenings of the outside world provide the ambient noise to the equation. The sound originates from the body and the listener can tune in to their own frequency and then allow the outside ambient noises to enter and become part of the collective noise inside their senses. This is where listening starts.

"-not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. The nature of these is unpredictable and changing. These sounds (which are called silence because they do not form part of a musical intention) may be depended upon to exist. The world teems with them, and is, in fact, at no point free of them."[1]

Sounds, as natural phenomena are not only ever present but ever necessary. Listen closely and the listener is treated to sounds, in the pure essence of their existence, in which they should be heard. There is no control over these sounds, no playback or record and no interference. When this sort of event is recorded its life is changed considerably. The listener can now hear the exact moment that they just heard again inside a different environment. These sorts of recordings are an important factor in helping people listen to sounds. When heard out of their normal environment the recorded sounds become a new experience for the listener who is asked to actually re-listen as they address the source and its new existence.

The general public perception of noise is the central concern when bringing forward sound or noise as art. As CAGE said, "I believe that the use of noise wherever we

---

[1] JOHN CAGE, 'Composition as Process', Silence, London 1971, p.22.

are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating."[1] Most people although hearing noise, do not listen. Sounds generally register to an individual when they know that it can or does involve them. When a sound makes itself known and has the qualities to make itself the centre of attention, then people start to notice. What better example than the car alarm late at night in the relative quietness of your neighbourhood? I experienced such a situation recently when a neighbour's car alarm went off for a long period. The sound of the alarm was the car's horn constantly sounding, no pattern or rhythm, just continuous. The car was next to a tall concrete building and the wall amplified the sound. In these circumstances I tuned in to that noise and listened closely, aurally investigating it and how it worked with the other sounds in my environment. I welcome this sort of event, where I have no control, as a chance to enjoy the structuring of this kind of listening experience. Sound has many forms and to escape any of them is not an easy task. Ambient noise is constantly changing and always surrounding and must be embraced to be understood.

The amount of noise that today's society produces, has dulled the perception of sound and its use inside an art context. So much noise surrounds us that individuals can find themselves overwhelmed. This noise in its environment is usually considered to be an annoyance or interference. So much noise is superficial and can be ignored or in the case of *muzak* has been designed to be there but not there. The radio is quite often on in many places you enter and as SCHAFER says, it is 'the bird song of the twentieth century'[2], and its constant noise

[1] CAGE, 'The Future of Music: Credo', Silence, p.3.

[2] R. MURRAY SCHAFER, 'Radical Radio', Sound by Artists, Canada 1990, p.211.

produces 'sloppy listeners'[1]. We learn to block out the continual background noise. Even CAGE first admitted that he "never enjoyed the sound of radios"[2] but after making Imaginary Landscape IV, he "frequently composes with the radio on"[3]. Even as I write these words I have the radio going, not for any particular listening purpose but just as an accompaniment to the other sounds around me, like the hum of the air-conditioning and the distant noise from the street. Writing in so-called "silence" is something I am unable to do. The noises that emerge from that silence distract and ask for attention. Having the radio going somehow blends all the ambient noises together, enveloping and unifying them, which allows me to concentrate.

All this noise comes and goes and people pay attention to it, albeit apathetically or passively. Far fewer people go to great effort to appreciate silence, though many seek it as an escape from sound. When a 'silence' is achieved (what the listener at the time determines to be silence in the environment or situation), listeners are more aware of what is around, as the absence of noise makes the environment much more aurally transparent. In this apparent absence of noise, what do we look for? A visual cue as to what sound we might next expect to hear; an object or event that has the potential to create sound. Silence is the most powerful element sound has and the duration inside this silence is its fundamental characteristic.[4] Without our own versions of silence we

---

[1] Ibid., p.211.

[2] CAGE, 'Composition as Process', Silence, p.30.

[3] Ibid., p.30. Imaginary Landscape IV was a piece consisting of twelve radios each being operated by two performers. One would control kilocycles and the other, tone control and volume. The performers had notation to follow and a conductor would beat 4/4 time.

[4] "It is very simple. If you consider that sound is characterized by its pitch, its loudness, its timbre, and its duration, and that silence, which is the opposite and, therefore, the necessary partner of sound, is characterized only by its duration, you will be drawn to the conclusion that of the four characteristics of the material of music, duration, that is,

could not begin to identify sounds, as we would not be able to ascertain one sound from the next. Our personal 'silence' gives us the opportunity to listen to noise and sounds individually or collectively. These silences also give us the chance to listen to silence itself, as it is full of sound and just as rich as the sounds that surround it. In that silence the potential listener is opened to what comes from it and what is beyond it. Although the attainment of silence is as stated previously impossible, the hunt for it is the experience of listening.

"Not one sound fears the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound."[1] Inside the silence the ear is presented with sounds that can be addressed as a new experience and a new attempt at listening.

My imagery addresses the elements of the video medium; video signal breaks, glitches and black essential to my work are, in other contexts, seen as technical faults. The imagery comes directly from the heads of the video player and the manipulation of them in a way that shows the roots of the technology, the analogue world. This physical interaction with the medium is present at all stages of the work, as opposed to a digital transfer. It is an escape back to the beginning; a sort of nostalgic engagement with our technology and from that an attempt to model a future.

---

time length, is the most fundamental. Silence cannot be heard in terms of pitch or harmony: It is heard in terms of time length." CAGE, 'Defense of Satie', Documentary Monographs in Modern Art, edited by Richard Kostelanetz, London, 1971, p.81.

[1] CAGE, 'Lecture on Something', Silence, p.135.

Chapter 2 Influential Theory:

JOHN CAGE.

"What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking."[1]

JOHN CAGE's Lecture on Nothing and Lecture on Something are two important texts that have been a big influence on my work.

CAGE talked about finding the 'old sounds'[2] which described to me how I found my video vision.

"I begin to hear the old sounds - the ones I had thought worn out, worn out by intellectualisation - I begin to hear the old sounds as though they are not worn out. Obviously they are not worn out. They are just as audible as the new sounds. Thinking had worn them out. And if one stops thinking about them , suddenly they are fresh and new. "If you think you are a ghost you will become a ghost." Thinking the sounds worn out wore them out."[3]

The old vision for me was the static, the technicalities that happen inside the player. My previous theoretical stance took a new approach with the help of CAGE as I looked at this work not as just vision, but as potential sound as well. As CAGE believed noises had been discriminated against[4], I believe that the creative potential of static has been overlooked. I find beauty in static where the signal is disturbed and the roots of the technology are showing. To come across a 'glitch' (broken

---

[1] CAGE, 'Lecture on Nothing', Silence, p.109.

[2] Ibid., p.117.

[3] Ibid., p.117.

[4] "Noises, too have been discriminated against, and being American, having been trained to be sentimental, I fought for noises. I liked being on the side of the underdog." Ibid., p.117.

video signal) for me is a delight, a rare occurrence that needs to be captured if possible and played with. I wish to see these glimpses collated and implemented over time and allowed an alternative viewing. These pieces are from the very essence of the concept of the monitor and are not to be seen as opposite to normal but as shadows[1]. As CAGE said, "Every something is an echo of nothing."[2], and the echo of my concept of the monitor are these glimpses. Although they portray nothing to me they are everything; they are the beginning of the video's technical and my analogue vision. On one hand I am discussing nothing in the sense of non-sight and silence but then on the other I am discussing what happens in these spaces that allows them to be. So silence needs noise, non-sight needs vision and 'nothing' needs imagination. Though those examples never actually contain themselves or anything else they are parts of each other and necessary for their own existence.

To return to the first quote of this section from CAGE 'What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking'[3], this is part of the backbone of my thoughts on non-sight and the black or static of the monitor. Just as CAGE states, that silence requires him talking, non-sight requires that we see, and video needs black/static. So to fully appreciate the silence, CAGE says we must have noise, and so I present an interrupted video signal as the silence in our visual noise. One of the attributes given to static or a broken signal is that it is 'noisy', which has fascinated me for the fact that although it produces noise, if viewed without

---

[1] The use of the word 'shadows' here is a reference to MORTON FELDMAN's use of the word as CAGE remembers in Lecture on Something; "I remember now that Feldman spoke of shadows. He said that the sounds were not sounds but shadows. They are obviously sounds; that's why they are shadows. Every something is an echo of nothing." CAGE, 'Lecture on Something', Silence, p.131.

[2] Ibid., p.131.

[3] CAGE, 'Lecture on Nothing', Silence, p.109.

sound it is something totally different. One of the dictionary terms for noise is "any undesired electrical disturbance in a circuit, etc."[1] People do not usually go out of their way to watch video noise or listen to static. People avoid it. Very much like CAGE's reference to the 'old sounds'[2], my looking at these transmission technical faults is akin to a fresh examination.

BILL FONTANA.

'Sounds that repeat, that are continuous and that have long duration defy the natural acoustic mortality of becoming silent.'[3]

An artist internationally known for his experimental work in sound is American, BILL FONTANA. The physical environment for FONTANA is a live source of musical information that can bring forward visual imagery through its aesthetic and evocative qualities. He creates site-specific installations that bring a new aural environment into the city.[4] He was one of the first sound artists whose writings I found accessible. Around the same time, I was studying the writings of the FLUXUS artists DICK HIGGINS and EMMET WILLIAMS whose concepts I found alienating. FONTANA's writing reflected what I was thinking and inspired my early research. It must be acknowledged that his work owes a lot to that of the *Futurists* and CAGE but it was he who made the connection for me. The aspect that impresses me most about his work, is his choice of environments in

---

[1] The Angus and Robertson Dictionary and Thesaurus, Sydney, 1992, p.673.

[2] CAGE, 'Lecture on Nothing', Silence, p.117.

[3] BILL FONTANA, 'Sound as Virtual Image', http://www.resoundings.org, p.1.

[4] This excerpt is reworded from his General Statement on his website; http://www.resoundings.org

which he presents them. He brings natural noises into the city where anybody can enjoy his work and does not place them in the confines of a gallery[1]; that is an ideal I aspire to.

The transmission breaks that I talk about are ignored because of a 'concept of the monitor' similar to FONTANA's 'concept of noise'[2] where the viewer perceives vision, when it is placed in the area of the television monitor. The viewer takes on what is placed in front of them as what is normal monitor behaviour, always consisting of recognisable imagery. Looking past this imagery we are presented with the breaks that go ignored because they are initially harsh to look at and they disrupt normal viewing. These breaks are necessary viewing because they show the viewer the other side of the monitor and it's technicality, and without being able to see these breaks you cannot appreciate clear reception and recognisable imagery.

> "We look around and almost everything we see, except for light reflections and shadows, corresponds exactly to the place being looked at. Listening does not have the same sense of spatial correspondences as visual perception. With visual perception, we look directly at what is being seen, in listening we orient ourselves to where the sound is, not necessarily to where it is coming from. In visual perception, there is simultaneity between the viewer and the object of perception. With sound there is often a time lag, since we often hear a sound before or after we see it. In aural perception, we sometimes do not see what we are actually hearing. Because sound is experienced in a 360 degree way, we hear overlapping residues of many sounds at any given moment. If we were trained to turn mentally towards everything we hear, we would achieve a sense of spatial correspondence comparable to visual perception. Since as a culture we are not trained to bring this mental orientation to sound, this time lag between what we see and what we hear

[1] FONTANA, 'The Environment as a Musical Resource', http://www.resoundings.org, p.1.

[2] FONTANA, 'Sound as Virtual Image', p.1.

> and the resulting disparities between our senses of visual and aural spatial correspondences have contributed greatly to our present cultural blind (deaf) spot - the concept of noise."[1]

The concept of the monitor unlike FONTANA's concept of noise is a perception that has a fixed point. FONTANA says that with visual perception the viewer looks directly at the what is being seen[2], although I believe peripheral vision plays an important role in this vision as it directs us like listening does. We are directed towards what we hear and as FONTANA says sound is experienced in 360 degrees[3] and allows the viewer to find the source within many other noises. Although we look directly at what is to be seen, our peripheral vision allows us to take in the full extent of that sense. Though not as effective as our sense of sound and it's capability to find and register noises this vision is necessary and helps to find more. So from this peripheral vision we are led to other visual cues and quite often noise. The peripheral vision allows the viewer to trust their eyesight if what in front of them is necessary but what comes from the side is the determining factor. Peripheral vision needs to be discussed here so we then can compare it to FONTANA's concept of noise but also to then narrow it down to the concept of the monitor. When looking directly at something our concentration lies in the space that it inhabits and usually what is in the general vicinity around it, but that concentration is distracted and tested by what lies out from that general space. We see a small space that has our attention and unconsciously keep an eye on what is happening around our whole field of vision. The aural distractions, surrounding us could be said to be

---

[1] FONTANA, 'Sound as Virtual Image', p.1.

[2] Ibid., p.1.

[3] Ibid., p.1.

equivalent to the visual distractions that exist in a more limited space. There is always something to look at and our eyes have been trained to take in as much as possible. The 180 degrees of vision we have augments the 360 degrees of sound. But then what does all this have to do with the concept of the monitor? Firstly the television viewing habits of the population and the programming by the stations initiates this argument. Our vision is continuously being processed, compacted down and recycled into the small space of the screen. So once the viewer approaches this screen all attention is put upon it and even though the peripheral and directed vision come into account, the monitor is the focus of our visual concentration. This is where the concept of the monitor is born and nurtured. Even with an understanding and appreciation of video art, the viewer can still have a perception of the monitor as television. As an artist, I also confront this obstacle, building on it considerably and also preying on it.

"If they stick with the work they will be drawn into a different sort of moving image than they are used to. Working with video allows me to prey on the unsuspecting as I have the advantage. Just the power of the moving television image which can hold people's attention is my weapon."[1]

These monitor experiences are judged not by what is on it but by the power of what is on it, so once a viewer approaches a piece of video art the thinking becomes different. Usually video art is approached in the gallery space so that also helps in the different approach.

FONTANA talks about the ignored sounds[2], the sounds that take place all the time but are not given any notice unless put in a place where people will associate

---

[1] Duncan Robinson, '22', Honours thesis, University of Tasmania, 1998.

[2] FONTANA, 'The Environment as a Musical Resource', p.1.

them with what it is. The ambient sounds that FONTANA describes need to be placed in new environments so listeners can hear that these sounds exist as an element without associated image. He also makes an important reference to where the ambient sounds take place, but also to how we attempt to block them out. FONTANA says that the environments in which we listen to noises, sounds and music, are different but I also interpret this to mean that those places and devices he mentions, 'concert halls, home stereos, walkmans etc[1], focus the listening experience. Concert halls are designed specifically for listening to music and to keep ambient noise at bay, just as home stereos allow the listener some control over what they hear. Best of all are walkmans where the individual can tune in and block out all noise with their headphones, which interestingly enough provide their own ambient noise in other people's listening. For me the walkman is important in this equation due to the fact that it becomes a solitary experience. With headphones on people seem to ignore a lot of what goes on around them. Listening with headphones on puts the individual into a protective bubble[2] from ambient noise and is an attempt to disengage from it.

NEGATIVLAND once asked 'Is there any escape from noise?'[3]

---

[1] Ibid., p.1.

[2] "Noise is garbage. Headphone listening puts a protective seal between it and the customer. It is not a corrective against a noise pollution but a prophylactic." SCHAFER, Sound By Artists, Canada, 1990, p.211.

[3] NEGATIVLAND, Escape from Noise, U.S.A.,1987. NEGATIVLAND are a subversive band who play with noises, instruments, samples and the copyright laws that dictate the use of such samples.

Chapter 3 Related Art Practices:

Cut and Paste:

COLDCUT, HEXSTATIC, RESIN DOGS And WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS.

One of my first introductions to the world of *techno* (to use the broad term) was the English duo of BLACK and MORE, better known as COLDCUT. At that stage in my own work I was editing quick moving imagery with heavy repetition. On seeing the Timber video, I discovered an editing style I could look up to and learn from. Timber included samples of industrial sounds from chainsaws, circular saws, a car starting and other assorted machinery. The sources of the sounds were on the screen in unison. The sophisticated editing of the video and audio caught my attention. I found that COLDCUT's mix of samples and beats and the way they deconstructed vision and sound to create something totally new from the remains had a great influence on me. The pieces are the samples, the offcuts from a media driven world. The layers of the samples produce their own rhythm just as the drum and bass section of a band would. COLDCUT fuse vision and sound together to bridge a gap in the acceptance of noise.

HEXSTATIC, who worked with COLDCUT on the Timber clip and song among others, have produced their own work comprising of music, videos and new video/sound software. I came across their album completely by accident in a shop in Sydney and was impressed by their use of beats and found sounds. The sounds used as beats range from a car door slamming to

small vocal loops to fax machine noises. A CD-ROM came with the album that provided video clips to each song. They worked in a similar style to that of the Timber video clip but improved upon it and used a more advanced technique. In doing this HEXSTATIC shows the listener how exactly each song was created. Even though they provide the origin of their beats, their creation of them is unique. Each element is there, the source is right in front of your eyes and the sound is all in the edit.

Noise and sound found in everyday occurrences are the music here and in most cases are the only elements used to create these tracks. In the track Deadly Media, vocal samples of only one tenth of a second duration are repeated to create a high-pitched noise resembling a cymbal or high hat and another provides a noise similar to that of a bass drum. These samples relate the music back to its source and put a mirror up to the society that it came from. In the track Auto a variety of car noises are used as beats much as a drum would normally provide and in the tracks Machine Toy and Bass Invader, toys and computer game sounds take on the role of the lead guitar dominating the other underlying elements.

HEXSTATIC provide a video/audio experience that allows us to see the source of the beats and how it changes the way the sound is heard.

The RESIN DOGS are an Australian band that cut and paste with sound. They use samples and constructed beats from noises as undercurrents and sometimes as a more dominant force in their work but rely more on conventional instruments than the previously mentioned bands. They work in a variety of musical styles to produce a range of grooves, from *funk* to *rap* and *hip-hop*. There is a sense of playfulness, humour and freedom in their music, which manifests more strongly then in the work of the others. This may be due largely to the fact

that they are not metaphorically restrained by the instruments they use. HEXSTATIC and COLDCUT use stationary electronic and computer based equipment which force them to be standing still and concentrating at their 'instruments', whereas the RESIN DOGS have the freedom of movement.

As far as cutting and pasting sound goes, one of the most notable artists was WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS. I have included him in this section because of a CD I came across of his work called Break Through In Grey Room. His work and history are vast and during early research I came across his cut up technique on the Internet, which he used in text, film and audio. But when I found this CD I was taken to some of the earliest cut and paste work involving all analogue tools. BURROUGHS, IAN SOMMERVILLE and BRION GYSIN made the cut-ups between the 60s and 70s. The recording on to tape contains a warmth that is not often heard nowadays, as it is contained in the analogue machines they created with. But more importantly is the way these tapes were randomly cut and 'dropped-in'[1], which take stories to a surreal sound experience. Silver Smoke of Dreams is impossible to follow but transcends a story as it takes the listener to strange places as the 'drop-in' method changes the pattern of the normal speech. Hearing words stick out provides visual cues but only confuses and disorientates the listener.

This work is important for me as it took me back to the beginnings of analogue audio creation and showed me how it was done.

[1] 'Dropped-in' is a term used by BURROUGHS, SOMMERVILLE and GYSIN to describe a technique used in their audiotape creations. It was a random placing of audio over another track.

Dirty Clean Bleeps:

MR. OIZO, MOUSE ON MARS and B(IF)TEK.

MR. OIZO is a French producer by the name of QUENTIN DUPIEUX that is well known for his heavy distorted beats. The bass turns into a sort of noise weapon where it starts to crackle and break up from the original sound. What would normally be a rumble turns into a crumble as the sound falls apart. As the sound goes past optimal output levels the well-known hiss comes into play, being that noise that hides underneath in the higher frequencies which is normally taken care of by equalising. MR. OIZO makes no effort to hide it though as and I think he knows this is part of sound and it belongs there. This is what excites me most about this artist, the fact that he uses these sounds as essential tools to the overall sound, in fact they are integral. MR. OIZO is not afraid to be a bit cheesy and have a bit of fun; some noises used as beats are a bit kooky or stupid, the noises you would expect to hear from children's squeaky toys. But combined with the underlying simple drum and bass loops, they provide elements needed to carry the distorted beats and hiss into *techno music* territory.

MOUSE ON MARS are a German duo who formed in 1993 when ANDI TOMA and JAN ST. WERNER met at a *death metal* concert and decided to form a band. Their use of noise folds over itself and into each other and the layers in the music although sounding complex do not become complicated. The construction of these layers is intricate and it is possible for the listener to hear these layers at different points in the music. In this manner the

sounds can join each other but are still allowed their own space and therefore do not complicate each other. In these layers individual beats and sounds are allowed to stamp their own authority in each track. Asked if he was interested in layering sounds ST. WERNER replied "I think over time you just become more trained or more skilled in shaping space. I think it's very much the thing that is important to us - the space, and the space between the sounds. But still we think that all these elements have space, and that's just something that comes. It's a certain flexibility or a certain knowledge that you just get through the time. You just want to see how complex you can get."[1] This for me is a crucial idea: the in-between sound or silence is the key to noise and their respect and knowledge of this is what makes their music enchanting. No one noise, sound or loop is over used as they seem to give them just enough time to register to the listener but do not allow them to get too familiar with it, so it remains enticing and asks to be listened to again. "For me, our music reflects society; it reflects randomness and a certain incalculable combination of units and entities. So, I could also see a cosmic quality in there, with things colliding and crashing."[2] The randomness in MOUSE ON MARS' music is very different compared to the other artists I have mentioned in this chapter. Their music comes from the sources that weave in and out of each other during each track. The total array of sounds over the whole album can seem accidentally constructed but the intentional structure of the sounds is apparent. The layers and space in the music allow all elements to blend and still have their own part. 'There's randomness that you have when you just sit in a café and you see people moving by, and there are strange algorithms that provide you with new random

[1] JAN ST. WERNER, interview by Mark Richard-San, April 2001 http://pitchforkmedia.com/interviews/m/mouse-on-mars-01/

[2] Ibid.

patterns all the time. People are showing up, they're disappearing, and suddenly there's one again. There's a certain rhythm in there, but you cannot really strip down that rhythm, you don't find a logic for that. That's what our music tries to display."[1]

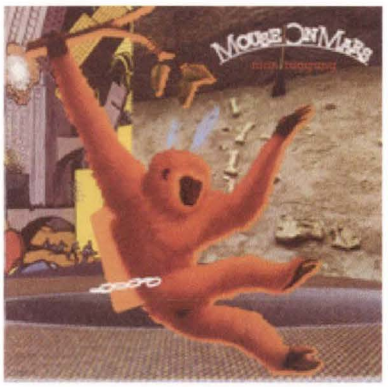

Figure 3.1: artist unknown, Niun Niggung, album cover for MOUSE ON MARS, 1999

Like the other artists in this chapter I was taken by MOUSE ON MARS' use of noise on the album Niun Niggung, but what distinguishes it from the others is the very clean overall sound. Although some sounds push the volume limits, the bass sound early in the track Yippie is quite distorted, similar to MR. OIZO's bass crumbling sound. Although using breaking beats (Yippie and Wald F.X.) the sound comes out clean and very well produced. The clinical computer sound is blended with warmer analogue and orchestral sounds. The combination is energising and MOUSE ON MARS' sounds comes across complicated but effective in a respect for sounds and their simplicity.

B(IF)TEK are an Australian duo composed of KATE CRAWFORD and NICOLE SKELTYS who are very interested in the noise of machines. They use very old samplers and keyboards to produce their version of space

[1] Ibid.

music. Reminiscent of early science fiction their music is full of bleeps, beeps and other noise niceties. There is a nice crisp clean production to their work and this is necessary as the sounds are separated from older technologies. Their edge lies in this bringing of old sounds into the present as a soundtrack to the coming future and its possibilities. The beats and bleeps in their work are not layered like those of MOUSE ON MARS, but are very similar to MR. OIZO's simple approach to particular sounds and exploration of them. These sounds are carried along at a relaxed pace and float in technical synthetic bliss.

Static, White Noise; I'm in Heaven:

OVAL, MERZBOW and KK NULL.

Using found sound is nothing new in music. These artists combine found sounds to piece together their music. The essence of their work lies in the analogue and its limits. These artists use the static and white noise sounds to blend the analogue, electrical and industrial. The listener is being asked to endure and to confront these sounds, to hear how they are at the core of sound and society itself.

MARKUS POPP also known as OVAL, makes loud yet soft noise. Listening to his work is to be immersed in a sort of static distorted bath. His use of static comes across as a purely beat element. In between these beats found sounds are pushed past acceptable volume levels to distort but in a way that somehow allows them to still be quiet. These elements are also turned into beats; to become an ambience of sound that floats back

into the electrical hum that is contained in our dwellings. Layered to create texture rather than music, OVAL's work fills the space in between a lot of what we hear and a lot that we block out. His use of sound laps gently at the analogue shore where jarring noises, soft beats and energised sounds are smoothed out as the easy listening music for the industrial mechanical world.

The *Japa-noise* artist MERZBOW (real name MASAMI AKITA, born 1956 in Tokyo) has a long history and many recordings to show his love of noise and things electrical. "My first motivation for creating sound was anti-use of electric equipment - Broken tape recorder, broken guitar, amp etc. I thought I could get a secret voice from equipment itself when I lost control. That sound is unconsciousness, libido of equipment. Then I tried to control them with more powerful process."[1] Unlike OVAL, MERZBOW's use of static is thunderous, a continuous barrage of noise that leaves the ears ringing even when the volume is down. If OVAL laps gently at the shore then MERZBOW is a tsunami of white noise crashing over Tokyo. Everything is turned up yet somehow doesn't break up. "Most Japanese noise artists never use computers or very high-tech equipment. We tend to be very low-tech and analogue, so our actions show the effects of expanded noisehands, muscles...the body's movement."[2] This retaliation against the technology driven society of Japan has given artists such as Merzbow the incentive to get inside analogue tools and their sounds. He talks of "the effects of expanded noisehands" showing us that that these sounds are a direct product of the human interaction and without this, these sounds would lie dormant. This barrage of noise for me is a celebration

[1] MASAMI AKITA, interview with Dixon Christie, http://noiseweb.com/merzbow

[2] MASAMI AKITA, interview with Arthur Potter, Ibid.

of society and it's constant changing nature. For example, in the tracks Tint One and Tint Two no reprise is allowed and although packed full of sound there is a simplicity that allows the ear to take in everything. This is a storm of electrical white noise and you are soaked to the bone by the amount that is thrown at you. Amplified to make it louder with layer upon layer of the same sound, the noise becomes more than the original source. For me MERZBOW has captured the essence of the technological electrical world. He collects the noise waste, shapes it and presents it inside a new space.

Another Japanese artist working in sound is KK NULL, whose power for me was in the flesh, so to speak. In a sense his work is like MERZBOW, white noise bombarded at the listening audience in various forms. The first time I saw KK NULL in Hobart, 1997, I had no idea what to expect and was blown away, literally. When he returned to perform a year later, the cacophonic beauty of the sound he created was shattering. I felt like I was back in the womb. The noise is hard to remember but the feeling is hard to forget. I could feel my brain throbbing from the excess of noise and for the first time in my life I was physically aware of the fluid inside my skull. I could feel this fluid was gently moving due to the noise but also to keep my brain calm and allow it to keep working. The continual noise lulled me to sleep almost, I can remember trying to stay awake. I was unaware of the rest of my body, as the sound's domination asked that the ears and the brain used all my energy in processing the noise. The physical effect of the noise made my eyes water and ears ring during and afterwards, even though I was wearing earplugs. I am sure that that experience destroyed part of my hearing. It was like the Concorde breaking the sound barrier just above you, continuously for about forty-five minutes.

All his noise comes from one guitar and several guitar pedals. To produce feedback by holding a guitar's pickups close to the speaker is extremely easy but to have creative control while doing this is very difficult. KK NULL, although not needing to place the pickups close to the speakers as it is already so loud, shapes the noise with an uncommon artistry and subtlety. White noise is a delicate place. This created man-made noise is an ultimate sound experience and has been forever etched into my brain and hearing.

Vision and Sound in Harmony:

DAVID LYNCH.

Filmmaker, DAVID LYNCH has a great deal of input on the soundtracks of his creations. On his first feature length film, Eraserhead 1979, he created the soundtrack himself - working with ALAN R. SPLET. The heavy industrial soundscape he created is an important part of the narrative, as evocative as the images in its own right. Dialogue seems secondary to the ambient noise - the background noise is brought forward to be a central focus throughout the film - the dialogue is sparse and minimal, dominated by the roar of machinery. The film has a distinct feeling of a series of tableaux being moved by the churning sounds that grind in its dark world. These sounds come from the surrounding industry and breathe a sort of life into the characters and their interactions. It's as though the characters do not have a voice - but a noise - as though they themselves were one of the machines.

LYNCH's most recent film The Straight Story, 1999 also implements his signature use of sound. A particular scene that illustrates this style is one in which the main

character is talking to a stranger on the road. The camera is approximately twenty metres away and the viewer is given the point of view of the camera, so we feel like we are looking in on these two men talking. The microphone that recorded the audio must have been right next to the camera as the dialogue between the two men is very faint and almost impossible to hear save the occasional word or two. This scene allowed the viewer to feel like they were part of the movie as if they were another character standing by the side of the road, looking on and unintentionally listening in. I would like to compare that to another sound environment in another LYNCH film. In Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me there is a scene inside a nightclub where the music is overpowering and the conversation between the actors cannot be heard. The viewer is forced to rely on subtitles[1] to know what is being said. Having that sound overload and seeing the characters shouting above the music puts you right there, looking in and trying to overhear their conversation. Once again this is an example of LYNCH's simple but effective use of background noise masking dialogue to achieve a sense of realism. In Eraserhead he used this technique in a more exaggerated form to achieve a surrealism.

In all his films, LYNCH puts as great an emphasis on sound as vision. For this reason he is, for me, the quintessential filmmaker.

[1] The subtitles were added after a test audience could not handle the fact that they could not hear any of the characters' dialogue.

Necessary Continual Listening:

SQUAREPUSHER and APHEX TWIN.

Two artists working specifically in sound, its sources, structures and limitations are RICHARD JAMES better known as APHEX TWIN and SQUAREPUSHER, also known as TOM JENKINSON. They both play with noises – such as machinery and static - in similar ways, using them as beats and major compositional elements. The thing that distinguishes them from each other is the sounds they place around their noises. In most cases, while APHEX TWIN uses programmed bass, drum machine and keyboards, SQUAREPUSHER plays the bass guitar for recording and for his live set, accompanied by a drum machine. It is my observation that the fact that he plays the guitar allows him to do certain "show-off" pieces that would otherwise not be possible. He sometimes takes it too far and the bass can dominate, as in the tracks Rebus and Male Pills Part 1. His talent allows him to be versatile, crossing genres and combining styles from *techno* to *acid jazz*.

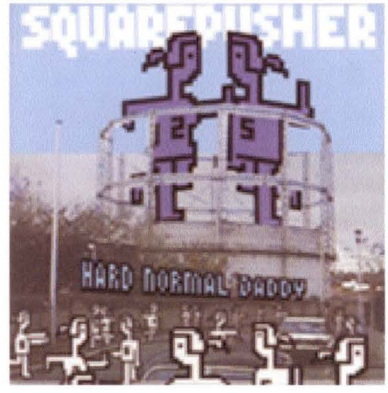

Figure 3.2: CLAYTON, JOHNNY, Hard Normal Daddy, album cover for SQUAREPUSHER, 1997

The album Hard Normal Daddy floats in and out of this *techno/jazz* territory. The track Chin Hippy is layers of noise, staccato drumbeats, high hats, bass guitar and explosions; which keep no musical time in the conventional sense.

Like APHEX TWIN, he can show an apparent disregard to the structure of time in music. In the track Mind Rubbers off the album Selection Sixteen, the bass rolls along whilst drum patterns and noise fill in amongst it with no respect for how the bass travels; the elements

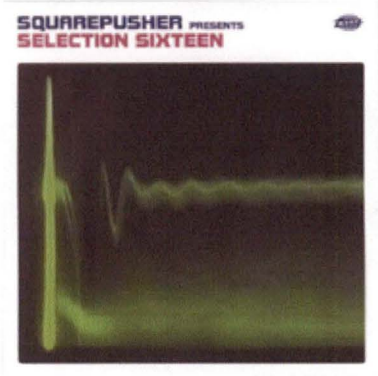

Figure 3.3: JENKINSON, TOM and KLEBER, Selection Sixteen, album cover for SQUAREPUSHER, 1999 -

coexist discordantly without harmonious interaction. He does the same on the track Time Borb off the same album but in this case it is just a barrage of noises and the listener is asked to define each beat to its source. A simple bass line and drum fill introduces the song but the noises take over and in the end the track has a duration of only one minute and three seconds. He does not indulge in the noises and allows them to leave quickly. This entices me back to the track and the album as they are edited with consideration for the sounds and do not become lost in repetition.

SQUAREPUSHER provides sound at a different level to most and in my opinion pushes at boundaries that need to be broken.

APHEX TWIN's sounds come from a large array of sampled noises collected over the years; sounds from his customised keyboards, samples and computers. "I do like to make things as simple as possible. I like the sound of pure things. I don't like it when things get too cluttered so you can't hear everything. My aim is to make music that sounds as simple as possible but is really complicated underneath."[1]. He is bringing forward sounds that are known and putting them into the context of where they do not belong, as part of music. James provides an alternative where everyday noises are used as important tools and devices inside his songs. Everyday noise becomes a repetitive tone or beat, and transforms inside each composition as it combines with other elements. In the music of RICHARD JAMES the listener is forced to address the use of noises inside a new environment where noises are combined and put with electronically produced beats. As SATIE said, "a music, that is, which will be part of the noises of the environment,"[2] this is music for today where it fits snugly inside the hum of the city, the electricity dependant world. The hectic rate of some of his work shadows the pace of modern life. The hyperactive beats jump continuously from one to another changing at speed and very often with no regard to being in musical time. For me, this is the music that fulfils a need. A very short attention span is a difficult thing to please and this music is the perfect way to keep a generation of people raised on computers and television interested. As each sound comes and goes, due to its extreme nature, it invites

[1] RICHARD D. JAMES, interview by Richard Hector Jones http://www.aphextwin.nu

[2] ERIK SATIE, quoted by JOHN CAGE in 'Erik Satie', Silence p.76.

investigating and repeated listening, to fully comprehend and enjoy. "I like fast stuff to keep my brain interested. I get really bored with loops going around for ages. I need something happening all the time to keep me interested."[1] This is music that accompanies the sound of the city, the industrial heart, the mechanical beat that drives the populace. "I like my ears to be alerted like every few seconds. I like something different to happen, something good to go on."[2]

Figure 3.4: JAMES, RICHARD and CLAYTON, JOHNNY, Richard D. James Album, album cover for APHEX TWIN, 1996 -

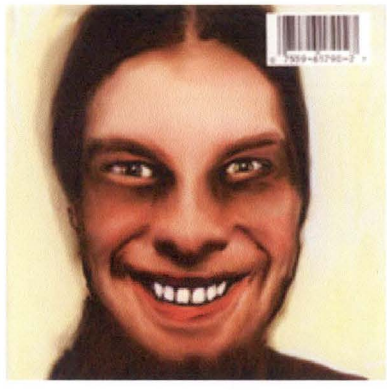

Figure 3.5: JAMES, RICHARD, I Care Because You Do..., album cover for APHEX TWIN, 1995 -

[1] JAMES, interview by Theresa Stern
http://www.aphextwin.org/reading/perfect.htm

[2] JAMES, interview by unknown
http://www.aphextwin.nu/reading/interview-articles/spaceagebachelor-1999.htm

Examples of JAMES' work that show this, are the APHEX TWIN releases Richard D. James Album, 1995 and I Care Because You Do..., 1996. They are full of drum patterns that defy the rigid structured nature of the drum machine; actual melodies and samples that cannot be placed. A perfect grab of today's information overload packed into a constantly changing, hyperactive array of inputs and outputs.

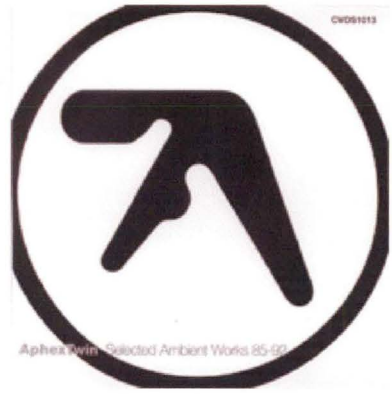

Figure 3.6: JAMES, RICHARD, Selected Ambient Works 85-92, album cover for APHEX TWIN, and 1999

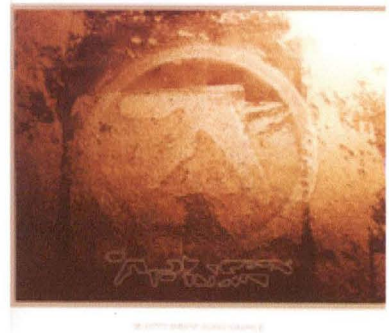

Figure 3.7: JAMES, RICHARD, Selected Ambient Works Volume 2, album cover for APHEX TWIN,1994

JAMES can also provide something of an escape in a more subdued fashion. Selected Ambient Works 85-92, 1999 and Selected Ambient Works Volume 2, 1999

provide a more relaxing environment, even though still ripe with noises and extraneous sounds, the overall feeling reflects the title. Unlike the other examples, which demand attention, the sounds on these albums are at home in the immediate space you're coming in and out of. The sounds that come from these albums are an open invitation to come and go as you please and partake when something attracts your attention or your want to listen. This ability for the sounds to become part of the background is not a bad thing; to say go there and not be intrusive or entertaining in any sense. These sounds blend into the background because it is like they are suddenly back where they belong. They were taken from a source and when played back have the opportunity to rejoin their familiar surroundings. These sounds are the basis to the background that had been missing and their ability to blend into their environment is possibly the best quality they could have. They provide an accompaniment to everyday life inside. It is as if these tracks bring the harshness of the outside world in, but make it an easier pill to swallow. JAMES knows how to listen and sounds are the trigger for anything that follows.

"But music doesn't have to have tunes to be music. I can listen to a single drumbeat for hours sometimes and just get into rhythms and things. I mean, not all of my stuff has a tune, some of it sounds. It's sounds that I'm obsessed with and the tune comes later, if it comes at all."[1] APHEX TWIN's music is an inexhaustible source of inspiration to me, with each listening there is something new, not only to hear but to process, to stimulate my imagination and my understanding of sound as an art form.

---

[1] JAMES, interview by Mark Sutherland for the NME http://www.aphextwin.nu/reading/interviews/wehavewaysofmakingyoutalk-1995.htm

Epilogue:

An aspect of *techno music* is the drug culture that surrounds it - it is a part of the creation and appreciation of the sounds. 'Ravers' allow the music to enter their whole body and they move all their limbs and dance to the rhythm of the beats. I'm not making the assumption that they all take drugs, as many don't, but from my observations they seem to take the same course as the drug-takers as they switch off and the body moves freely. And this is the main difference between them and me, and to why I listen to noise the way I do. They seem to hear the music with their whole body hence the dancing, but I only hear with my ears and my brain. I sit back and allow the sounds to come in and my brain sorts through them as I listen to their intricacies, both singularly and as parts of the whole. Occasionally my head might move to a beat but I find dancing gets in the way of my listening. These are also general comments and not some sort of attempt at examining the culture, because I am not immersed in it and therefore cannot enter too deep into the argument. I am just an outsider listening in and occasionally looking. I am more content to sit at home and listen to the artists I want to hear, rather than go out and be presented with the unknown. I am not searching for the way to move or an expression of my body, but I am looking for the experience of listening. It doesn't have to be music or loud noises, it can be anywhere anytime as I find something to listen to in every situation and environment. I particularly enjoy the noises and sounds that are taken from our environments and technologies. That is the reason I look for and enjoy this music. It is the way that some artists play with these noises and sounds and what they create from it. These artists are providing the soundtrack to today's and the future's society. As we fall more and more into this vast

technological world the artists playing with the sounds that come from that world are showing us what we are making and where we are headed.

Chapter 4 How The Project Was Pursued:

Studio Based.

Continuing to address my video and vision based work, I found images of glitches, broken frames and tape attributes and gave them new context using repetition. In my exploration of the generation of analogue video, the element of physicality became crucial to my intervention and ability to control the creation of sound and image.

I started with no preconceptions about the limitations of the medium and through trial and error developed my own process for creating analogue video imagery.

At the start of this course, having reached what I thought to be my saturation point for working with moving imagery, it seemed a natural progression to work with sound, which has always been a primary influence. My approach was to read into the history of sound and noise as an art form. The theories of composers such as CAGE, the futurist MARINETTI and Russian film makers EISENSTEIN and VERTOV have become just as influential on my work as the work of the contemporary artists I have focussed on in this paper.

Reading about their methods and ideas brought me to a realisation. Sound didn't need to be created, it was an inherent associative element of the video intervention.

Performance/Installation.

My home video player started to play up as the heads degraded, and it provided me with an idea. What

would happen if I tried to play with the speed of the heads? Initially, gentle manipulation, which progressively became more aggressive, from altering the head speed to crunching the tape before and after it passed the heads, provided beautiful pieces of colour and static from a black tape. The chance creation of these pieces was an attempt to show the interior, the essence of the technology and in the case of the random colours, a mirrored version of the pressure on the retina when the eyes are closed.

This physical interaction with the video player became the backbone of my work and ideas. The projected performance/installation was the original and main output of this project as I was attempting to get away from the monitor based video image. One of my major influences came from contemporary electronic music, so I was interested in this direct contact being responsible for the effect and likened it to the 'scratching' done by a vinyl DJ. I was fascinated by the ability of black tape to produce vision. This seemed to me to be the embodiment of the extremity to which video vision can be taken.

Figure 4.1: Performance at Big Day Out, January 2000

In the performance the viewer is presented with 'black' projected onto a wall from a triple beam projector, covering an area of approximately three metres in height by four metres in length. Ideally the performance piece is conducted in a totally darkened room with one wall painted white and the others, black. Participants enter the space one at a time. Due to the nature of most available performance spaces, the visual distractions are many, sometimes even including myself performing the piece. The images are created by direct manipulation of the moving parts inside the player. I use a video player, with the outer casing removed to expose its mechanics, a projector, my hands and a tape with black burst on it. This tape is central to the piece. The black burst on the tape I use is a generated signal that is needed for the player to recognise the control track, without which the video display counter will not tick over. Control track is electronic sprocket holes recorded on videotape to guide the heads and control tape transport during playback.[1] As the tape makes its way through the player the information on it is read and processed by the machine and becomes a visual output. It's the disruption of the control track that causes the glitches.

Each manipulation has its own effect and variances, for example, coloured spots that fly across the black from right to left, that I initially called 'headspecks' for identification purposes. I created these, by placing a finger gently on the spinning drum just above the tape. The drum is placed on an angle and the tape spins around it, providing enough room for a finger. Running a finger (for me it is usually the right index finger) up and down on the drum affects the nature of the 'headspecks' and their intensity. I am under the impression that it is the grease or

[1] http://www.kodak.com/US/en/motion/support/glossary/glossary.shtml

sweat on my finger that catches on the tape and transfers to the head as they connect. It does not leave a permanent mark on the tape, as I have used the same tape for the performance/installation every time I have shown it.

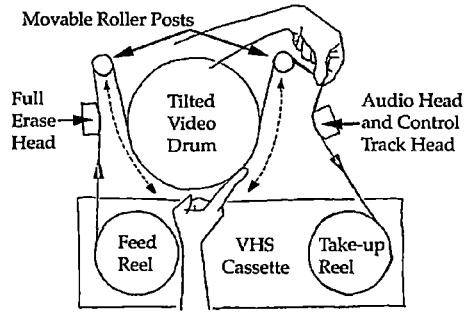

Figure 4.2: Downes, Chris, illustration detailing the inside of the video player and placement of fingers for 'headspecks' and 'static bars'.

The static bars require a far more violent action and affect the tape and machine a lot more. As the tape is carrying the black burst signal, to get a complete field of static is difficult. The 'static bars' that I created came from crunched tape. Reaching inside the machine and grabbing the tape with my index finger and thumb before or after it runs past the heads, generates these bars. Also placing my finger on the heads slows the tape down and creates static. Pressing my finger on the drum in the same way as for coloured spots or 'headspecks', but a lot harder, also creates static.

All of these manipulations obviously go against the machines' ordered way of doing things and sometimes if taken to an extreme can send the machine into a sort of panic which causes it to stop or eject the tape. Also, working with these elements limited my options as far as projectors were concerned. When showing this on a digital projector the signal would stop at the first sign of breaking

up, reverting to a standby screen until the signal was in synchronisation. The three-beam projector, being analogue, was able to sustain the imagery that I forced along the cables. I haven't found a monitor yet that will not take this signal.

The projection, showing video black with occasional flashes of colour, is an attempt to recreate the experience of closing one's eyes tightly. The viewer is asked to believe their eyes are closed and then open their ears to the sound accompanying the vision. The sound encourages the viewer to listen and question the ambient sound around them. The sound has varied with each performance, ranging from loud noise to controlled sounds and silence. After many presentations, I removed the sound as it became an unnecessary element. As I have said before, the visual fragments that I generate carry their own aural illusion. Also doing the performance in 'silence' allows the viewer to listen to the sounds of the room and if they pay attention they can hear the sounds of my interaction and therefore put a sound to the visual effect.

As video is a time based medium, I wanted to put time constraints on the performance and make the piece an event, rather than monitor based. This interaction over time allowed each performance to have it's own characteristics as I played to the environment I was in, the sound or music that was being played, or the mood I was in. The performance/installation piece allows the physical interaction to be an event, to take place once only and with each attempt to be a different experience.

Sound Piece.

I had previously used simple found sounds and microphone installations. The inspiration for my first new sound piece came to me while listening to sounds by

JOYCE HINTERDING, a contemporary Australian artist. Her sound was sourced from antennas that she built to pick up the sounds from the weather, storms and the environment.

I wanted to work with the idea that sound can create movement so I recorded onto a cassette the low rumbling bass sound of a tractor. I took the sound into SoundEdit16. This computer program was used to repeat the sound so it went from being a ten-second loop into a twenty-five minute track. I pitch shifted the sound to make the most use of its bass. Two versions of this were then burned to an audio compact disc to use in the piece. From there a compact disc player was hooked up to a bass amplifier and twelve-inch Celestion speaker. The speaker box was then placed on a wooden platform so a microphone could be put directly underneath the speaker cone. This microphone was plugged into an amplifier with a headphone output which bought the sound back to above the speaker box where a multiple headphone set was situated each with its own volume control. This allowed the listener/participant to approach the sound and listen to it in two forms. The idea is for the listener to hear the sound and to follow it to find its origin, whereupon they can then feel it as well. Through headphones the participant would hear the same sound but with a different perspective. The idea is that the participant can not only feel the sound through their feet but also hear that sound separately, through the headphones. The primary focus is the sensation that the sound creates rather than the sound itself.

The Pit and the Pendulum.

Although not part of my primary work, this piece was done in collaboration with another video student

(CRAIG D. BLOWFIELD) and students from the Conservatorium of Music. This involved adapting EDGAR ALLAN POE's story The Pit and the Pendulum, combining it with music recorded by the Conservatorium students. My part in this was lighting and filming a live performance of the music on location and in the studio, and editing the footage.

Figure 4.3-5: ROBINSON, DUNCAN and BLOWFIELD, CRAIG, Stills from The Pit and The Pendulum, 1999-2000

This project required a high degree of flexibility and consistency of quality in its output as it was to be produced in multiple versions. To simplify this process I decided to engage with digital editing, which up until this

point I had rigorously avoided. We used the program Premiere 4.2 to edit the footage on a Macintosh 8600 and a G3 and I found it easy to use. The program was very basic and moving around inside it was quite simple and not as daunting as I expected. It did still take a lot of effort and time to edit the footage and many hours of waiting as the computer rendered movies for us.

This was the first time I had edited to a storyboard with vocal synchronisation and these technical requirements presented a new set of challenges that I'd not encountered before.

Digital Vs Analogue.

In the imagery of my performance/installation there is a visual analogue "hum" equivalent to that which you would hear in the end grooves of a record or on the end of a cassette tape. It is an electrical sussurance like the sound of blood rushing through your head when it seems all else is silent.

Chance creation is paramount in the way I approach my work. The control comes from stopping and grabbing from the analogue and giving it order.

The computer was a tool for producing these pieces but after a while and some output (which included a set of prints, the only successful marriage between the two) the computer killed the physical interaction between the work and myself. Using the computer, my attempt to create by chance became too clinical, cold and lacking in the spark that came from the actual video tape manipulation. Taking it back to the edit suite allowed me to open up to the work and once again get physical with the tape through the edit. The physical interaction was controlling the randomness that came from the performance and working with imagery that really needed to be ordered, in

order for it to be bought back to the monitor. For me to find more amongst this research, I had to take this imagery back to the monitor, it's confines and its control.

Prints.

In order to free my work from the constraints of a monitor or projection, I worked with digital prints captured from the performance. This provided me with the chance to see the work in another medium. Initially, I used heavy repetition, each print representing a frame. In the end the number of prints was less but each had its sense of origin, and together looked like a length of videotape enlarged and stretched out across the wall. The stillness in them allows the viewer to see one single frame; an image that occurred for a moment in time captured from a tape. Although digitally post-produced and printed, the prints came directly from the source of the heads of the video player and my interaction inside and manipulation of the moving parts.

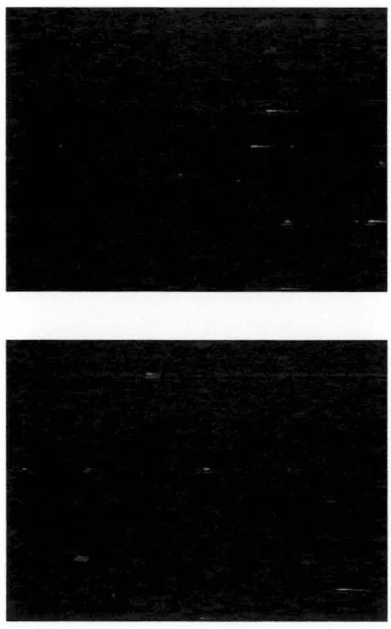

Figure 4.6,7: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, 22

The prints are something but represent nothing[1].

Edit.

The performance/installation is a singular experience but the footage that it produced needed to be taken further. Taking this imagery back to the monitor was the next step from that piece. I recorded the live performances onto videotape. These direct recordings gave me new edits and footage to play with. The step from there was to move into the edit suite and live with it, whilst I edited in an attempt to see how the different pieces fitted together and which loops and fragments needed further exploration. The style of edit that I used in this work was the same that I employed in all of my previous work. Editing quickly with one edit following straight after the last, making the duration of the edit decision fast and leaving a lot to chance in how the final work was seen. I would only go back over the piece if something undesirable entered into the edit, such as the momentary appearance of colour bars that could break the immersive experience. Other pieces were edited using the 'last edit' facility which tells the video player and recorder to make the same edit decision again at the new 'in point' (in and out points signify where to start and finish recording for both the player and recorder). This function enables me to make very large numbers of brief edits and loops in a time efficient manner.

In between the frames of 'created static', I found a movement. Using the control panels' dials and switching from one frame to the next, I saw that all the visual effects

[1] This is, for me, a way of describing my work as well as a reference to Cage's points of 'nothing' and 'something' in his 'Lecture on Nothing', Silence, p.114, and his 'Lecture on Something', Silence, p.129.

move, either subtlety or quite noticeably. To capture these, I made a direct recording onto tape by pressing play and record on the recorder, therefore bypassing the control panels' error detection facility, which would not normally allow such a recording to be made. Then pressing play on the player and slowly jogging through the section that contained these analogue oddities. This gave me a recording I could edit from, which I did using the before mentioned last edit command.

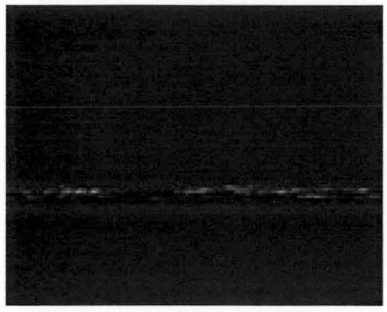

Figure 4.8: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, static bar still, 2001

It was from the performance/installation footage that I sourced the static bars that are prominent in my final work as loops. The static that had been created from the manipulation and bending of the tape had a life of its own, and was different to that of common static. The static I created took varying forms and positions inside the monitor.

Other pieces that came from the footage included random edits of my "headspecks" that were a feature of the performance and my favourite effect from the manipulation of the video heads. Also amongst the footage there were many short pieces of broken signals that were created accidentally or had come from damage to the machine or tape during the recording. Through editing and repetition I developed their potential.

Projections.

The projector pieces functioned more effectively when viewed on a large scale that reflected the size at which they were originally seen in performance. They could not be squashed back into the confines of a monitor; they needed the freedom of a large area. I want these pieces to immerse the viewer in the beauty of my analogue world, where colours and static glide along and transcend the stigma of annoying static. Their larger-than-television scale allows them to confront the viewer. Their content should not overpower but wash gently over the viewer.

The first of the projector pieces is two projectors side by side projecting an edit of the coloured headspecks from the performance. Both play exactly the same imagery in an attempt to mirror the effects of closing your eyes very tightly and putting pressure on them with your hands.

Figure 4.9: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, detail from two projector piece, 2001

The second projector piece also contains imagery from the performance. The footage in this piece has a very unassuming presence as the fragments show only one or two "headspecks". They vary in their duration and can be hard to find. This piece plays with the viewers' perception a little more as their eyes are asked to move around to see the dots or the traces of them.

The projector pieces have a beauty that gives no hint as to their harsh origin. They move fast but can be read quite easily, the gentle noise they convey, although silence in reality, is inside the mind of the viewer. Although they carry the potential of static and themselves are a product of forced intervention they are the subtle beauty of this body of work, the most easily accessible.

Monitor Pieces.

Returning to the monitor with its inherent size restrictions, I decided to use a variety of configurations including multiple monitors and loops.

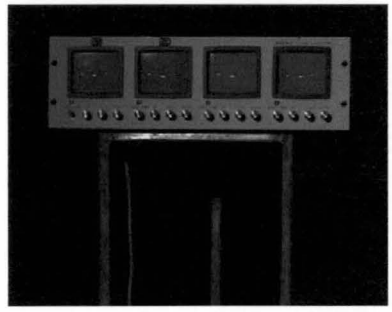

Figure 4.10: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, Installation shot of bank of four monitor piece, 2001

I displayed an eight-frame found loop of static in a bank of four small monitors to intensify its effect, using the repetition of both the screens and the footage. The loop showed spots, which look similar to my "headspecks". The monitors are black and white and old and when the loops are viewed on their screens they appear to add extra static, which enhances the effect I set out to achieve. I wanted to run this imagery through those monitors as the actual physical size of them contains the imagery and forces this static into a restrictive space. Multiplied and repeated, the imagery makes the mark that

I wanted; it brings the viewer in close to see what is happening and wonder at what they are watching.

The three monitor piece containing different lines of constructed static is an attempt to show how static can be created deliberately, not only accidentally. Putting these lines inside small monitors returns the performance to the television and the ideas and annoyances behind broken signals and static.

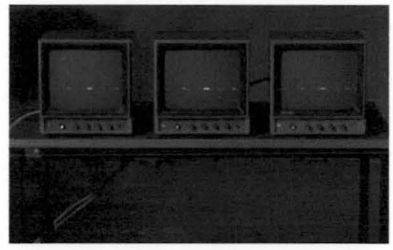

Figure 4.11: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, Installation shot of three monitor piece, 2001

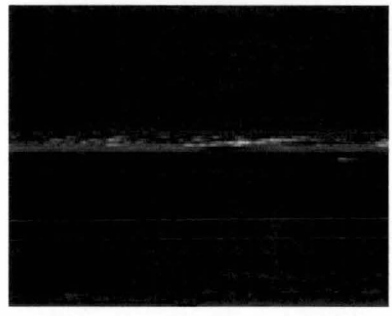

Figure 4.12: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, Still from three monitor piece, 2001

I wanted to return these static bars to the size at which they are thought to have originated. These bars were born in the performance and are now being put back into the relative confines of a small monitor. The imagery in the three monitors next to each other is bouncing along and seeping into each other showing that this static has different forms and potential.

The first single monitor piece is a five minute loop of imagery generated from the manipulation of the video heads. The footage is not edited, unlike all the other

pieces, and shows the chaotic nature of my interaction with the video player.

The second monitor piece is a loop of what I describe as rolling black. The screen is filled with black and is replaced by dark grey as the screen fills from bottom to top and repeats. This loop has a duration of ten frames. It is a broken signal, captured and multiplied.

The third piece uses a single monitor, which contains colour, and static flashes captured between frames as described previously in the edit section of this chapter. This piece shows shaking static bars recorded during a performance, edited through several generations to achieve the desired result.

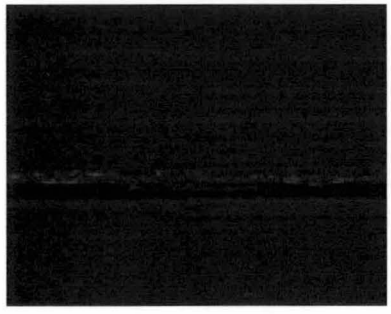

Figure 4.13: ROBINSON, DUNCAN, static and colour flash still, 2001

All the monitor pieces are taking the physical interaction and manipulation executed in the performance back to the form which inspired them in the first place. They address the old technology that is starting to be phased out, but the imagery itself addresses the constant changing nature of society. Even though we are bringing in new and improved visual technology, the static in my work is showing the decay underneath. These visuals contain a noise of their own. They are the beginnings of my creation in sound.

For Speaker.

The final installation in this body of work was a collaborative sound exchange, with Christopher Arneaud-Clarke at Entrepot Gallery. We chose a minimalist approach.

We performed in the gallery space for two hours each day for one week, using a microphone, mixer, video player and computer. We recorded the ambience sounds in the room, microphone feedback and incidental sounds of our equipment. We digitally manipulated these recordings using Sound Edit 16.

As part of the installation we held a special event; a Noise Orchestra. The public were asked to bring along a sound. Chris conducted from a score (pictured below) whilst I recorded the sounds individually and collectively.

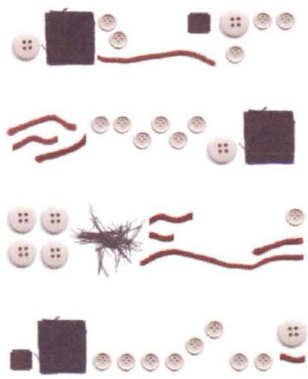

Figure 4.14: Score from the For Speaker exhibition

We made two more recordings with our orchestra of noise. These recordings gave us an excellent opportunity to hear other people's interpretation of what noise meant to them.

Chapter 5 Conclusion:

The analogue space that is being forgotten as new technologies appear and supersede it, cannot and will not disappear without being noticed. The digital world that is gradually taking over does not allow the video tape to have a place as it does not carry the quality that people are now demanding. But in this digital world we are quite happy to be confronted by glitches and transmission breaks in the form of popular entertainment and culture. These static interruptions which are now easier to swallow with the next disposable movie, popstar, etc. were founded in the analogue space where tape was running and leaving a random element to play. I have taken from this space, played and seen how the analogue is the basis and provider. For us to know what good is we need to know its opposite, and this pertains as well to the imagery we are given in the form of television or any sort of filmic means. To take this 'bad' image, direct from the source and enjoy it has allowed me to turn it into something 'good'. I was always expecting people to find the work confronting and irritating, but to my surprise I got the complete opposite response. I was told how beautiful the colours were and that they saw more into static then they had before. To transcend the harshness of my intervention into the analogue and create something beautiful has been the challenge. I believe I have succeeded. Given a new life, these analogue breaks are allowed to breathe again and are shown to be more than an annoyance but something that can be looked at without the immediate reaction of turning it off or turning it down. Turning down is not an option. The images float in space without sound but carry their own pre-determined sound as they wash over the viewer.

I jumped in with a video player, a black tape, my hands and no boundaries. From that I have produced a body of work I feel is indicative of the video medium but more importantly of my experience inside that analogue space. I have taken an old technology about to be left behind and shown that it is still has a place and has an unbelievable random beauty that cannot be obtained anywhere else. This accidental random analogue world has for me captured the way I feel about the world and allowed me to express it. It has opened up ideas and thoughts that would have otherwise stayed shut and every moment of it has been memorable.

Bibliography: Reading.

Aumont, Jacques, Montage Eisenstein,
BFI Publishing, London, 1987.

Brakhage, Stan, An American Independent Film-maker
Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1980.

Cage, John, A Year From Monday,
Calder and Boyers, London, 1968.

Cage, John, Silence,
Calder and Boyers, London, 1971.

Cage, John, Documentary Monographs in Modern Art
Ed. Richard Kostelanetz,
Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1971.

Cage, John, Composition in Retrospect,
Exact Change, U.S.A., 1993.

Chedd, Graham, Sound,
Aldus Books, London, 1970.

Curtis, David, Experimental Cinema,
Studio Vista Limited, London, 1971.

Eisenstein, Sergei, Film Form,
Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1949.

Eisenstein, Sergei, Film Sense,
Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1968.

Eisenstein, Sergei, Notes of a Film Director,
Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1970.

Ewen, David, Composers of Tomorrow's Music,
Dodd, Mead & Company, New York, 1971.

Hayward Gallery, Film as Film,
Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1979.

Hayward Gallery, Spellbound,
The Beacon Press, London, 1996.

Helmholtz, Hermann, On the Sensations of Tone,
Dover Publicatons, Inc., New York, 1954.

Kahn, Douglas, Noise, Water, Meat,
The MIT Press, U.S.A., 1999.

Kaleta, Kenneth C., David Lynch,
Twayne Publishers, New York, 1993.

Lautreamont, Maldoror,
Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1972

Lander, Dan and Lexier, Micah, Sound by Artists,
Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, Canada, 1990.

Marsh, Ken, Independent Video,
Straight Arrow Books, San Francisco, 1974.

Martin, Ann, Listen!,
Murdoch Books, Sydney, n.d.

Mudie, Peter, Dusting off the Other,
Uniprint, Perth, 1993.

Paik, Nam June, Video Time – Video Space,
Edition Cantz, Stuttgart, 1991.

Renan, Sheldon, The Underground Film,
Studio Vista Limited, London, 1967.

Roach, Martin, The Right to Imagination and Madness,
Independent Music Press, London, 1994.

Schafer, R. Murray, The Music of the Environment,
Universal Edition, Austria, 1973.

Schafer, R. Murray, The Tuning of the World,
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., U.S.A., 1977.

Sharp, Peter E.M., Sound and Vision,
McDonald & Co., U.S.A., 1967.

Sitney, P. Adams, Film Culture,
Secker & Warburg, London, 1971.

Sitney, P. Adams, Film Culture Reader,
Praeger Publishers, New York, 1970.

Sitney, P. Adams, Visionary Film,
New York Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 1974.

Thomas, Albie, Polemics for a New Cinema,
Wild and Woolley, Sydney, 1978.

Turim, Maureen C., Abstraction in Avant-Garde Films,
UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1978.

Youngblood, Gene, Expanded Cinema,
E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1970.

Weis, Elisabeth and Belton, John,
Film Sound: Theory and Practice,
Columbia Universtiy Press, New York, 1985.

Bibliography: Listening.

AFX, Analogue Bubblebath 3,
Rephlex Records, U.K., 1997

AFX, Analogue Bubblebath 4,
Rephlex Records, U.K., 1994

Amon Tobin, Remutation,
Ninja Tune, U.K., 1998

Aphex Twin, Classics,
Warp Records, U.K., 1995

Aphex Twin, ...I Care Because You Do,
Warp Records, U.K., 1995

Aphex Twin, Richard D. James Album,
Warp Records, U.K., 1996

Aphex Twin, Aphex Singles Collection,
Warp Records, U.K., 1996

Aphex Twin, Selected Ambient Works 85-92,
Warp Records, U.K., 1999

Aphex Twin, Selected Ambient Works Volume II,
Warp Records, U.K., 1994

Aphex Twin, Drukqs,
Warp Records, U.K., 2001

Autechre, tri repetae,
Warp Records, U.K., 1995

B(if)tek, 2020,
Sony Music, Australia, 2000

B(if)tek, Wired For Sound,
Sony Music, Australia, 2000

Burroughs, William S., Break Through in The Grey Room,
Sub Rosa, Belgium, 1997

Coldcut, Let Us Play,
Ninja Tune, U.K., 1997

Compilation, Braindance,
Rephlex Records, U.K., 2001

Compilation, Breakbeat Science,
Volume, U.K., 1996

Compilation, Elements,
MDS, Australia, 1997

Compilation, music for the motion picture π,
thrive & artisan, los angeles, 1998

Compilation, wap100 We Are Reasonable People,
Warp Records, U.K., 1998

Compilation, Warp 10+2 Classics 89-92,
Warp Records, U.K., 1999

Compilation, Warp 10+3 Remixes,
Warp Records, U.K., 1999

DJ Shadow, Endtroducing....,
Mo'Wax Recordings, U.K., 1996

Echoboy, Volume 2,
Mute Records, U.K., 2000

Hexstatic, Rewind,
Ninja Tune/NTone, U.K., 2000

Ishikawa, Chu, Tetsuo Soundtrack,
Japan Overseas, Osaka, 1994

Lionrock, City Delirious,
Concrete Recordings, U.K., 1998

Merzbow, Tint,
Vinyl Communications, California, 1996

Mike and Rich, Expert Knob Twiddlers,
Rephlex Records, U.K., 1996

Mouse on Mars, Niun Niggung,
Domino Recording, U.K., 1999

Mr. Oizo, Analog Worms Attack,
F Communications, Paris, 1999

Oval, Szenariodisk,
Thrill Jockey Box, Chicago, 1999

Plone, For Beginner Piano,
Warp Records, U.K., 1999

Raczynski, Bogdan, Samurai Math Beats,
Rephlex Records, U.K., 1999

Resin Dogs, Grand Theft Audio,
Hydro Funk Records, Australia, 2000

Resin Dogs, Live Like Dogs,
Hydro Funk Records, Australia, 2001

Sakamoto, Ryuichi, Anger / Grief,
Ninja tune EMI/Virgin, U.K., 1998

Seefeel, Succour,
Warp Records, U.K., 1995

Squarepusher, Selection Sixteen,
Warp Records, U.K., 1999

Squarepusher, Hard Normal Daddy,
Warp Records, U.K., 1997

Squarepusher, Feed Me Weird Things,
Rephlex, U.K., 1996

Voiteck, Truck2000,
Truck Musik, Australia, 2000

Zorn, John, The Bribe,
Tzadik, New York, 1998

C.V.

NAME:	Duncan Adam Robinson
DATE OF BIRTH:	5 September 1975
ADDRESS:	13 Seymour Street, Newtown 7008
HOME PHONE NUMBER:	(03) 62 781 069
CURRENT:	Master of Fine Arts 1999-
COMPLETED:	Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours (second class upper) 1997-1998 Bachelor of Fine Arts 1994-1997
GROUP EXHIBITIONS:	**Glass Eye** June 1997 Third Year Photography group show Entrepot Gallery **Empire** May 1997 various locations around Hobart curated by Tim Stone, Sean Bacon, Matt Warren

Peep Show
Honours showcase exhibition
October 1998
Plimsoll Gallery

Oedi Festival of Sound
August 1999
Snobby Socks Gallery

Intersection
October 1999
cr Punt Rd. and Swan St.,
Richmond
video projections
curated by Tim Stone and
Dion Sanderson

Shining Pixels
A collection of work from the
Centre for the Arts Video
Department 1980-2000

April 2000
Long Gallery
curated by Leigh Hobba

Between Phenomena
The Panorama in Tasmania
March - April 2001
Plimsoll Gallery
curated by Raymond Arnold

Somewhere Between Then and Now
September 2001
CAST Gallery
Curated by Kylie Johnson

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

22
(pieces from a mechanism that travels in a fixed course.)
June 2000
Entrepot Gallery
included video/sound performance

AUDIO EXHIBITIONS:

For Speaker
with Chris Arneaud-Clarke
June 30th 2000
Entrepot Gallery

BAND PERFORMANCES:

hMaS
Hobart
1993 - 1997
with Ben Crothers and Matthew Barnes (95-97)

Your Arse
Hobart
1996 - 1998
with Andrew Hazel, Tony Jeffries, Tim Picone and Simon Murray

werl
Hobart
2000 -
with Matthew Barnes, Bradley Nowland and Tony Jeffries

The Weekends
Hobart
2002 –
with Sara Mae Libero, Andrew Hazel and Chris Arneaud-Clarke

BAND AUDIO RELEASES:

My Sheltered Life
1994
with Ben Crothers and Julian Teakle

hMaS
1994

hMaS Goes Pop
1995

hMaS: The Computer Tape
1995

hMaS Live 10/4/96
1996

Your Arse
1997

BAND VIDEO RELEASES:

HMAS - an accidental series of movement
1997

SOLO AUDIO RELEASES:

&
1995

VIDEO PERFORMANCES:

Big Day Out
Boiler Room
February 2000
Royal Adelaide
Showgrounds
two and half hour long
performance to
local Adelaide DJ's.

Foyeristic
Centre For The Arts
July 13th 2000
two hour performance

CONFERENCE PAPERS:

Sensational 2
College of Fine Arts,
University of New South
Wales
November 24th 2000
title of paper: Physicality of
the Analogue
included a video/sound
performance